

CATHERINE'S LITERARY WORK

without even the smallest pause for thought, as though she were reading all she said from a book placed in front of her.¹ To these three was added, in 1378, the young Florentine, Barduccio di Piero Canigiani, who accompanied her back from Florence to Siena, and never left her until the end. During the last months of her life, while they were in Rome, he seems to have been her only regular secretary. At least five of the six letters of which the originals still exist were written by his hand.

Nearly four hundred of Catherine's letters have been preserved to us. It is easier to speak of their literary importance and their historical interest than of their spiritual fragrance, as of lilies of the valley plucked in some shaded world-forsaken garden, imbued with an unearthly, mystical beauty, as grown under suns that rose from a suprasensible orient. They are written to men and women in every condition of life and every grade of society. Her correspondents include a Romagnole mendicant in Florence, a Jewish usurer in Padua, no less than two Sovereign Pontiffs and three Kings. Leaders of armies, rulers of Italian republics, receive her burning words and bow to her inspired will, no less than private citizens seeking her counsel in the spiritual life, or simple monks and hermits in their cells striving to find the way of perfection. She can warn a Queen : " instead of a woman, you have become the servant and slave of nothingness, making yourself the subject of lies and of the demon who is their father" ;² while she bids the wife of a tailor : " Clothe yourself in the royal virtues." ³ Her wonderful, all-embracing and intuitive sympathy knows no barriers, but penetrates into the house of shame as well as into the monastery. While she writes to Suora Eugenia, her niece in Santa Agnese at Montepulciano, •'with desire of seeing thee taste the food of Angels," the mystical food, which is " the desire of God, whom the desire that s in the soul's affection draws to herself, so that the two become Dne" ;⁴ to the Abbess and nuns of San Piero a MonticeUi, ⁴ with desire of seeing you true servants and brides of Christ

¹ *Legenda*, Prologue I. (§7). ^a Letter 317 (316).

⁸ Letter 251 (362).

⁴ Letter 26 (159).